

II. PARK PURPOSES

MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM

The North Carolina state parks system exists for the enjoyment, education, health, and inspiration of all our citizens and visitors. The mission of the state parks system is to conserve and protect representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreation resources of statewide significance; to provide outdoor recreation opportunities in a safe and healthy environment; and to provide education opportunities that promote stewardship of the state's natural heritage.

RAVEN ROCK STATE PARK PURPOSE STATEMENT

Raven Rock, a bluff that juts out at a sharp angle along the Cape Fear River, has been a landmark to river travelers since before the Civil War. As land transportation improved, it became a popular regional destination for picnickers visiting the scenic river vistas and unusual bluffs. Local support for establishing a state park culminated in 1969 when the General Assembly authorized funding for Raven Rock State Park and thus preserved the site's natural and scenic quality from a potential mining operation.

The park's significant geological resources occur primarily along the Cape Fear River, the dominant surface water feature. Raven Rock, the bluff for which the park is named, is exceptionally tall for the Piedmont, with an elevation of over 100 feet above the river. It is the highest bluff in the North Carolina fall zone – the area where the more resistant rocks of the Piedmont meet the sediments and softer rocks of the Coastal Plain. The rocks forming the bluffs are 570 million years old and were metamorphosed on at least two separate occasions between 450 and 300 million years ago. The river, through millions of years of erosion, has sculpted the numerous metamorphic rock faces seen in the park today. Rapids, a typical river feature in the fall zone, occur at Fish Traps and Lanier Falls.

The significant biological resources include three registered natural areas: Raven Rock State Park Natural Area, Avents Creek-Cape Fear River Floodplain Natural Area, and Granitic Flatrock Natural Area. Successional communities derived from the combination of unique habitats and the interface of the Piedmont and Coastal Plain at the fall zone include maturing communities representative of the eastern Piedmont as well as a number of unusual natural communities. Unusual habitats include the bluffs, flatrocks and north-facing mesic areas with disjunct montane species. Pines and oak-hickory forest dominate the ridge tops, while mature beech and mixed hardwoods cover the slopes and floodplain. Remnant Piedmont longleaf pine trees and their associates are evidence of past forest types. Buttercup phacelia (*Phacelia covillei*), Virginia spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*) and eastern Isopyrum (*Enemion biternatum*) are representative of the many unusual plant species known in the park. One hundred eighty eight bird species, including the bald eagle, have been observed in the park. Fox squirrels (*Sciurus niger*), a declining species in North Carolina, are found in upland areas of the park. The park is

well within the fox squirrel's historical range, but diminishing habitat has reduced the prime range in North Carolina to the public lands in the Sandhills.

Significant scenic resources are found at the Raven Rock bluffs and along the park's waterways. Raven Rock's unusual rock formations and wide river vistas have made it a landmark on the Cape Fear River for over a century. The Campbell Creek and Avents Creek areas are particularly scenic because the steep slopes that surround them are more reminiscent of mountain terrains than the Piedmont. River rapids please both the ear and eye, and abundant displays of spring wildflowers - including mountain laurel and rhododendron - draw many visitors who come to enjoy the seasonal colors.

The extensive acreage at Raven Rock State Park is suitable for day-use activities such as hiking and picnicking as well as camping and horseback riding. The Cape Fear River is an exceptional resource for water-based activities such as paddling and fishing. The park's visitor program focuses on interpretation and education programs. Conveniently located near the Research Triangle, Fayetteville, Fort Bragg and smaller surrounding communities, the park can be easily accessed by a large population seeking natural resource oriented recreational opportunities.

The Cape Fear River is the focus of the park's significant archaeological resources. Prehistoric resources include Pre-Columbian artifacts such as projectile points, evidence that the river was once the site of Native American activities. Before the development of effective land transportation routes, the Cape Fear River played a major role in the growth and development of North Carolina. The 1850s era Northington lock and dam site, which accommodated boat traffic through the fall zone rapids, and the Northington Ferry site, which served as the main transportation link between Raleigh and Fayetteville until the Lillington Bridge was built in the 1920s, are both significant historical resources.

Raven Rock exists as a state park so that its valuable geological, biological, scenic, recreational and archaeological values can be protected. The Division of Parks and Recreation is charged with preserving these values and providing park experiences that promote pride in and understanding of North Carolina's natural heritage.